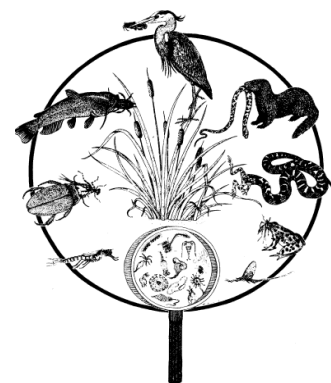


The Prairie Country Quarterly

A quarterly newsletter made possible by REAP funding



WINTER,
2022-2023

Restoration Complete at the Tenold Tract

You probably know us best as an agency that provides outdoor recreational opportunities to our county residents. County residents and visitors alike routinely visit our parks to camp, fish, hunt, hike, or to relax at our Lake Catherine Cabin. Although it's often easy to see the work we do to provide these opportunities to the public, often overlooked is the work we do to maintain and improve our areas for wildlife, such as maintaining nesting boxes, planting native grasses, creating fish structure, or developing new wetlands. One such project was recently completed at the Tenold Tract northwest of Lake Mills.



The 54-acre Tenold Tract was originally purchased by the WCCB in 2017 with money from a [Habitat Stamp Grant](#). Since the Winnebago River meanders through the area, the Tract is part of the 27-mile long Winnebago River Greenbelt, and consists mostly of prairie grasses that were planted in 2018. The area is very low-lying, so

the WCCB was able to receive a \$26,750 Habitat Stamp Grant to restore 6 small wetland basins, totaling about 4 acres, and to reseed much of the area to winter wheat, Canada wild rye, and other beneficial grasses.

That work was completed in November. As this winter's snow melts in the spring, the basins will fill in, creating a wonderful mix of grasses and wetlands. This habitat will benefit many different species of wildlife, including mallards, blue-wing teals, Canada geese, ring-neck pheasants, turkeys, white-tailed deer, river otters, beavers, muskrats, red fox and mink. Sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and bald eagles also all nest in the area. This restoration project will also help to protect the water quality of the Winnebago River by reducing runoff and sedimentation along the river.



Besides providing wonderful wildlife habitat, the Tenold Tract will also be open to hunting, trapping, and other compatible uses. To facilitate public use, a small grassy parking lot will be constructed on the northwest corner of the property, along County Road A16. Future management plans will also include periodic burning to control any woody vegetation that may creep in and to promote the growth of the native grasses.

Although they require maintenance just like our county parks do, wildlife areas such as the Tenold Tract are often overlooked by the general public because they are not used as much as our parks. But, these areas do provide valuable habitat, natural beauty, and other essential benefits. So, be sure to enjoy these places for the unique areas that they are!



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Did You Know?

- Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rainforests.
- Wetlands are nature's sponges, holding excess rainfall and releasing it slowly, reducing flooding.
- The vegetation in wetlands filters out pollutants and sediments, cleaning our water.
- Wetlands store carbon in their vegetation and soil, helping in our efforts to combat climate change.

Enjoy These Upcoming Programs...

(Of course, more programs will be scheduled throughout the year!)



Lake Catherine Ice-Fishing Contest—Saturday, February 18th

Join us for a chance to enjoy winter one more time before spring arrives! Our contest will run from 10:00 AM until noon at Thorpe Park's Lake Catherine. There will be prizes awarded in several age classes. If you need any ice-fishing equipment, just let us know and we can loan you some. They'll also be warm refreshments and free bait. And, we'll also be offering instruction for anyone who may need it!

Bluebirds in Iowa (Zoom Program)—Monday, March 20th

Spring means the return of the Eastern Bluebird and we want to help you welcome this beautiful bird back! Join us at 7:00 PM for a free, informative, online program about bluebirds and how we can help them settle in once they return! We will discuss their habits, where they live, their life cycle, and how to build and place houses to attract them. All participants will receive free bluebird house plans that they can use to build their own bluebird houses at home. To receive the Zoom link, just contact Naturalist Lisa Ralls at lralls@winnebagoccb.com.



Spring Stargazing—Friday, April 14th

Join us at the entrance to Thorpe Park at 9:00 PM for this leisurely tour of the spring nighttime sky! We'll say goodbye to the winter stars and constellations as they exit our skies, and welcome others as they take their place. There will also be a couple bright planets to check out, as well! The program will last about 45 minutes and star charts will be made available for people to take home.

Arbor Day Tree Giveaway—Friday, April 28th

Once again, we will be giving away free tree and shrub seedlings at the Thorpe Park office for Arbor Day! The 2023 varieties will be [Norway Spruce](#), [Shagbark Hickory](#), [Wild Plum](#), and [Aroniaber](#). The giveaway will begin at 8:00 AM and conclude at 4:00 PM. Quantities will be limited so that as many people as possible can take advantage of this offer. All seedlings will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, with any leftover seedlings available afterwards.



Building Better Birders Workshop (Spring Songbirds)—Saturday, May 13th



[BBB Workshops](#) are held throughout Iowa to help people learn more about Iowa's amazing diversity of birds! This free workshop will begin with a bird hike at Pilot Knob State Park, will include presentations on warblers, forest birds, and the Merlin Bird App, and conclude with a bird hike at Thorpe Park. Two other workshops are scheduled for later. Registration information will be available soon.

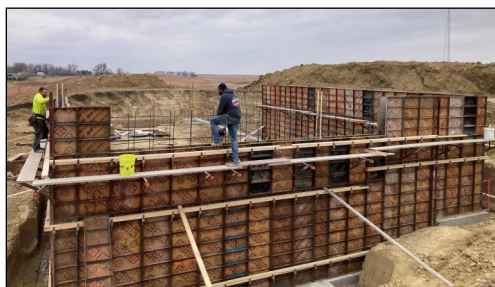
Thank You!

Drs. Randy and Mary Jane Hagenson have agreed to match up to \$50,000 of contributions made towards our new nature center! So, if you are considering donating, there's a good chance your donation will now be doubled. A huge thank you goes out to both Randy and Mary Jane for once again so generously supporting our project! We hope you'll take advantage of this match opportunity!



Environmental Education Center Construction Continues with a New Name!

The Hanson Nature Center!



Construction of our new environmental education center began in the fall and is continuing throughout the winter months! So far, electricity has been brought to the site, the foundation has been dug, and the basement walls have been erected. Construction will continue throughout 2023, with a completion date sometime in the fall or early winter. *One good sign that things are moving forward is that our new facility now has a name! In gratitude for the \$500,000 that the Hanson Family Foundation has contributed to our project, the Center will be called the Hanson Nature Center.*

But, we are so very thankful for *all* the support we have received from *everyone*. Even the small donations add up. In fact, many of the grants that we apply for ask how many individual donors we have had; that figure helps them to determine how much public support there is for our project. So, *all* contributions are important! And all that support has allowed us to get to where we are today. We are continuing to fundraise, though, because we still need to raise the last 15% or so of the building's construction costs. And, of course, we will also need additional money for the furnishings and exhibits. So, we are hoping for continued funding as we head into this final phase of our project!



If you would like to contribute and help us reach the finish line of this 4+ year fundraising effort, you can go to the home page of our web site (www.winnebagoceb.com). If you scroll down towards the bottom, you will see two links. One is a link to download a pledge form that you can mail in with a check. The other is a link where you can pay online using a credit or debit card. And, thanks to the Hangensons, up to \$50,000 of future contributions will be matched! (See the previous page.) All donations will be recognized in this newsletter, and all contributions of \$250 and higher will be recognized on a permanent donor board in the Center itself. And, since our Friends Foundation is a 301(c)3 non-profit, all donations are tax-deductible. Thank you, again! We truly appreciate all the support!

Thank You to Our Most Recent Donors!

We received the following contributions for our new nature center from July through the end of 2022. The donors are listed, along with their current donation level. *We are very appreciative of all their support!*

Anonymous (Chickadee)
Jim and Lorraine Amelsberg (Chickadee)
Daisy Huffman (Bluebird)
Paul Fitzgerald (Bluebird)
Belinda Friis (Goldfinch)
Scott Meinders (Cardinal)
J.D. Gullickson (Cardinal)
Tim and Julie Missal (Cardinal)
The Huntington Family (Sandhill Crane)
Donors of the Anonymous Fund/Community
Foundation of NE Iowa (Trumpeter Swan)

DeWayne and Berneice Maass (Trumpeter Swan)
Lynn and Julie Hagenson (Trumpeter Swan)
Drs. Randy and Mary Jane Hagenson (Bald Eagle)
In Memory of Susan Schoning:
Jane and Paul Nagy (Chickadee)
John and Karen Monson (Chickadee)
Duncan and Rozanne Murphy (Chickadee)
Lisa Ralls (Cardinal)
Brad and Loree Huntington (Sandhill Crane)
In Memory of Susan Schoning and Anne Frederick:
Brenda and Eric Rust (Chickadee)

Winnebago County Participates in Bat Survey

In 2022, the Winnebago County Conservation Board was asked to assist in [an annual survey of Iowa bats](#), conducted by the Iowa DNR and Iowa State University. We gladly accepted and were happy to participate in the 7th year of this important study!

Altogether, the study utilized 24 driving transects and 24 stationary sites throughout the state. Each mobile transect involved driving a predetermined route twice after dark, using a device attached to the top of a car to detect the sonar calls of bats. The stationary sites were all located near small wetlands where there were also some trees. Bat detectors were placed in each of these areas and left out for at least four nights. These stationary sites were designed to monitor how much bat activity there was in a particular area, including species diversity, whereas the mobile (driving) routes were able to determine the relative population of bats in an area.



Here in Winnebago County, Naturalist Lisa Ralls drove a 17-mile transect twice through a north-central portion of the county. Over those two drives, 14 bat calls were detected. The most common bats detected were [Big Brown Bats](#), comprising 4 of those 14 calls. [Tricolored](#) and [Evening Bats](#) each comprised 3 of the calls, while [Hoary Bats](#) made up 1. Three calls could not be identified.

Winnebago County's two stationary sites were both on public property. They recorded an average of 273.6 calls each night. As with the mobile routes, the most detected bats were Big Brown Bats, comprising 58.4% of all calls recorded. The next most common bats detected were Hoary Bats, making up 10.5% of all calls. Other bats detected, in order of abundance, included [Eastern Red](#), Evening, [Silver-haired](#), and Tricolored.

It may surprise some people that Winnebago County has such a diversity of bats. But, this research shows that our county actually ranks lower than most other counties, as far as bat populations go. While our mobile routes averaged 7 calls/night, the average number throughout the state ranged from 3/night to 97/night. And, while our stationary sites averaged 273.6 calls/night, the statewide average ranged from 56 calls/night to 1401 calls/night.

Biologists at Iowa State University and the Iowa DNR will now use this data to analyze population trends and will correlate it with habitat maps to determine which habitats are most utilized by Iowa bats. This will help them assess threats to bats, such as [White-nose Syndrome](#) and habitat loss, and make recommendations about which actions could be taken to help increase bat populations here in Iowa.

[So, why should we care about our bat populations here in Iowa?](#) Our bats are insect-eaters, and voracious insect-eaters at that! In fact, a single Little Brown Bat can easily catch and eat more than 600 small insects, such as mosquitoes, in just one hour. The larger Big Brown Bat feeds extensively on moths and beetles that are agricultural pests. In other parts of the world, most bats are nectar and fruit-eaters. Those bats are very efficient seed-dispersers and pollinators. In fact, more than 450 products that we use come from bat-pollinated plants. These include a variety of foods, drinks, and medicines, among other products. Needless to say, bats are very beneficial and are essential members of our global ecosystem. They deserve our protection.

If you'd like to help out the bats in your area, you can preserve wooded areas and/or erect a bat house. Especially here in Iowa, bats need adequate places to rest and raise their young. That usually means finding a hollow tree, some loose tree bark, or some other small, dark, sheltered location. These efforts can also discourage bats from looking for roosts in your own house. In return, the bats will reward you by taking care of those pesky mosquitoes in your backyard. You can often find bat houses at outdoor centers or online. You can also contact us for plans to build your own bat house, or you can find plans online.

Bats are beneficial, but often misunderstood. Hopefully, the research being done here in Winnebago County will help shed some light on these mysterious creatures. Then, we'll be able to better help them, just as they help us!

The 2023 Chickadee Checkoff

Do you enjoy watching eagles, butterflies, and cranes, or hearing frogs and songbirds? Then, you should contribute to the Fish and Wildlife Fund (also known as the [“Chickadee Checkoff”](#)) on this year’s Iowa state tax return. It’s an easy way to help out our nongame wildlife species!

Nongame animals are species that are not hunted, fished, or trapped. In Iowa, that includes over 1,000 fish and wildlife species, including raptors, songbirds, bats, frogs, and butterflies. The Checkoff is one of the only regular sources of funding these species have. Game animals such as ducks, geese, deer, turkeys, and pheasants benefit from money generated by hunting and fishing licenses; but none of that money is dedicated to non-game species.

Checkoff money is used for many things that benefit nongame species. Some of it is used to improve or restore wildlife habitat critical for at-risk species. Some of it is used to study species such as bald eagles, herons, frogs, and bats that need consistent monitoring.



And Checkoff money is also used to educate people about various non-game species, their status in Iowa, and how we all can help them out.

Unfortunately, only about 7,200 taxpayers (less than .5%) contributed to the fund in 2020, donating about \$150,000. Although that is a significant amount of money, it doesn’t go far when there are over 1,000 nongame species that depend upon that money. Taxpayers can decide how much they want to contribute and the average donation in 2020 was close to \$21. But, if every Iowa taxpayer would donate just \$1 to the fund, over \$1.7 million could be raised, more than 11 times what is currently contributed.

Fortunately, donating to the Checkoff is easy to do! If you’d like to help out, you can designate how much you’d like to contribute by going to Section 9 on your 1040 tax form and looking for the Fish and Wildlife Fund. The money will then either be automatically taken off your refund or added to what you already owe. That’s all there is to it! So, if you enjoy seeing and hearing all the wonderful species of animals that we are fortunate enough to have here in Iowa, please consider helping them out with a donation on this year’s tax form!

Hit the Trails This Year!

When the pandemic hit three years ago, people needed places where they could escape the confines of their own house or apartment, recreate, and safely connect with other people. For many people, trails allowed them to do those things! As a result, trail usage surged throughout the U.S. in 2020 to its highest level on record.



The question at the time, though, was whether or not that usage would continue after the pandemic ended. And, we now have our answer...Yes! In fact, according to a September, 2022, survey by the [Rails-to-Trails Conservancy](#), trail use was 45% higher in 2022 than in 2019, proving that increased trail use is continuing well past the peak pandemic years.

And that use is expected to continue to grow. Almost 2/3 of survey participants would like to use trails more in the future than they are now, and 87% say that trails contribute to the well-being of a community. The reasons people gave for using trails included exercise, enjoying a bike ride or a walk, spending time in nature, and managing stress.

So, as spring arrives, be sure to hit the trails this year! Many of our state and county parks have wonderful trails that you can leisurely enjoy to stay fit or to unplug from your daily grind. We hope to see you out there!



Amazon has announced that, as of February 20th, it will no longer have its AmazonSmile program.

So, we now recommend that you become a member of our Foundation, instead, and you can do that at our [web site](#). We want to thank everyone who has contributed to our Foundation through AmazonSmile over the years. Your support has been much-appreciated!

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"The Prairie Country Quarterly" is published, free of charge, four times a year. Please let us know if you'd like to subscribe to this publication. The public is also invited to attend our board meetings which are held at our Thorpe Park office on the second Monday of each month, beginning at 8:00 A.M.

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The WCCB, in the provision of services and facilities to the public, does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, or handicap. If anyone believes that he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint with the WCCB at the address above, or with the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of



If you know of a civic or scout group that would like to have an educational presentation brought to a meeting, just let us know!

Also, we are accepting donations to help cover the cost of seed for our bird feeders at Thorpe Park. Let us know if you'd like to help us out!

*Our Lake Catherine Cabin
will be closed
through February, 2023,
for maintenance work.
But, we are still accepting
future reservations, so book
your 2023 stay now!*



Don't Forget to Check Out Our Website!

We want to remind everyone of our web site! It contains WCCB news, a listing of all of our parks and wildlife areas, a listing of upcoming programs, and a lot of other information. You can even read this newsletter there or download a cabin reservation form. So, check us out at www.winnebagoccb.com! (You can use the QR code to access our web site.)

Be sure to also "like" our [Facebook](#) page or follow us on [Twitter](#) to keep up with the latest WCCB news!